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REVIEW OF SECTORAL CLUSTERS, FIRST PHASE: TOXIC CHEMICALS AND HAZARDOUS WASTES

Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

Radioactive wastes

1. The Commission acknowledged the report of the Secretary-General on progress achieved in the implementation of chapter 22 of Agenda 21 (E/CN.17/1994/15). The Commission requested the Secretary-General to issue an addendum to the report, including information on radioactive waste contained in the national reports received since the date of the report.

2. The Commission noted that the generation of radioactive waste continued to increase worldwide from nuclear power generation, the decommissioning of nuclear facilities, nuclear arms reduction programmes and the use of radionuclides in medicine, research and industry, and that enhanced effort had to be pursued, at both national and international levels, to promote the safe and environmentally sound management of radioactive waste.

3. The Commission also noted that radioactive defence wastes represented the same risks as other types of radioactive wastes. The management of radioactive defence waste was, in a number of countries, not subject to the same safety rules as the management of other radioactive waste and it was in those countries outside the control of national civilian radiation protection and safety authorities, but generally falling under military rules.

4. The Commission further noted that a number of countries had been involved in the monitoring and safe management of radioactive waste, that legislation had been enacted or amended and safety standards updated, and that licensing and control procedures had been reviewed.

5. The Commission recognized that efforts had been geared towards identifying and establishing permanent disposal sites for radioactive wastes and that

Governments were continuing their efforts to manage interim storage facilities and to find p actical measures for minimizing and limiting, where appropriate, the generation of those wastes.

6. The Commission welcomed the progress made in technical, legal and administrative measures at the national, regional and international levels with the aim of ensuring that radioactive wastes were safely managed, transported, stored and disposed of, or treated with a view to protecting human health and the environment.

7. The Commission supported the effective international cooperation in research, exchange of information and standard-setting that was carried out in the field under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and, concerning research and the exchange of information, the European Union. In particular, it welcomed the progress made in the IAEA Radioactive Waste Safety Standards (RADWASS) programme.

8. The Commission also welcomed the development by IAEA of the Codes of Practice on the International Transboundary Movement of Radioactive Waste and by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) of the Codes of Practice on the Safe Carriage of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High-level Radioactive Waste in Flasks on Board Ships.

9. The Commission expressed its satisfaction at the November 1993 decision at IMO by Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention, 1972) to convert the voluntary moratorium on ocean dumping of all radioactive wastes into a binding prohibition. That global prohibition would strengthen earlier bans agreed upon in regional contexts. The Commission urged all Contracting Parties to the Convention to respect its now binding character.

10. The Commission considered it an imperative principle that the export of radioactive wastes would be inadmissible to countries that did not have the technical, economic, legal and administrative resources for environmentally safe and sound management of radioactive wastes.

11. The Commission drew attention to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition to establish or strengthen their capacities for the safe management of radioactive wastes, including spent radiation sources.

12. The Commission:

(a) Urged Governments to apply the precautionary principle (e.g., preparatory measures for final disposal) in decisions concerning new or extended activities generating radioactive wastes;

(b) Urges Governments to undertake the further research and development of areas such as the minimization and reduction of volume of radioactive wastes, potential sites for the storage of radioactive wastes, safety and health standards associated with the handling of radioactive wastes and remediation procedures and processes;

(c) Calls upon Governments to fully implement the IAEA and other relevant codes of practice that have been adopted in the area of transboundary movements and the transport of radioactive wastes;

(d) Recommends that Governments encourage suppliers of sealed radiation sources to accept the return of such sources and ensure their safe and environmentally sound management after use;

(e) Calls upon Governments to ensure that radioactive wastes arising from military activities should be subject to the same types of strict safety and environmental regulations as those arising from civilian activities;

(f) Calls upon Governments to internalize, to the maximum extent possible, all costs of the operations of nuclear facilities and of related waste management, including the decommissioning of nuclear facilities;

(g) Supports worldwide efforts to demonstrate viable methods for the safe disposal of long-lived and high-level radioactive wastes and the reinforcement of international cooperation in the field.

13. The Commission urged Governments to promptly begin, in the context of IAEA, after the finalization of the Nuclear Safety Convention, work on the development of an international convention on the safety of radioactive waste management, including consideration, of the total life-cycle management of nuclear materials. In order to speed up the process, IAEA should urgently complete preparations related to safety fundamentals, which is a prerequisite for beginning such work.

14. The Commission invited IAEA, in cooperation with other relevant organizations, to continue to develop or improve standards for the management and safe disposal of radioactive wastes, and to report the results to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session.

15. The Commission called upon the international community:

(a) To further support the development of international standards for radioactive wastes management;

(b) To take all necessary steps so as to prohibit the export of radioactive wastes, except to countries with appropriate waste treatment and storage facilities;

(c) To strengthen cooperation and provide assistance to economies in transition in solving their urgent and specific problems due to improper treatment and disposal with regard to radioactive wastes;

(d) To provide technical assistance to developing countries in order to enable them to develop or improve procedures for the management and safe disposal of radioactive wastes deriving from the use of radionuclides in medicine, research and industry;

(e) To facilitate financial assistance to developing countries in order for them to address adequately radioactive wastes management problems.

16. The Commission calls upon Governments and relevant multilateral funding organizations to assist developing countries in national capacity-building for the safe and sound management of radioactive wastes.

17. The Commission urges Governments, together with IAEA, to promote policies and practical measures to minimize and limit, where appropriate, the generation of radioactive wastes and provide for their safe processing, conditioning, transportation, storage and disposal, taking into account the provisions of chapter 22 of Agenda 21.